

GREAT THINGS ARE HAPPENING IN RIVERSIDE UNIFIED SCHOOLS!

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Outstanding schools translate into a strong and vibrant community, with high real estate values, safe neighborhoods, longevity and viability of businesses, and civic pride.

A recent report on student achievement presented to the Board of Education of the Riverside Unified School District shows the Riverside community has much to be proud of in the performance of our local public schools. From the alphabet soup of high stakes testing and accountability (API, AYP, CAHSEE, etc.) to measures that are less often in the news but no less compelling, such as local, state and national competition and recognition, our schools have an increasingly positive story to tell.



Students enjoy reading in the award-winning garden at Washington Elementary School. Washington joined Alcott Elementary School as Riverside's second National Blue Ribbon School in two years.

Here are just some of the ways our local schools are excelling and providing bragging rights for Riversiders.

- **Academic Performance Index (API) Gains**

The Academic Performance Index uses annual testing results to rate schools on a scale of 200-1000. **Five** RUSD schools have an API score greater than 800 (the State's target) and another **22** are in the 700s. Secondary schools, especially, have begun showing great gains in student achievement – almost all middle and high schools had double-digit increases in their API score last year and 14 schools in the district grew by more than 20 points.

One of the most important aspects of the API is the ability it provides to track achievement growth over time; between 2000 and 2004, **nine** RUSD schools increased their API score by more than 100 points!

- **California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)**

RUSD high school students who took the exam last spring posted excellent results: 81% passed the math portion of the test (compared with 73% in Riverside County and 74% statewide) and 83% passed the English/Language Arts portion (compared with 74% in Riverside county and 75% statewide). Schools are working with the small percentage of students who did not pass one or both sections to prepare them to successfully retake the exam when it is offered again this fall and in the spring.

Beginning with the class of 2006, all students must pass the High School Exit Exam to earn their diploma in California.

- **Two National Blue Ribbon Schools in Two Years!**

This year, Washington Elementary School was the only Inland Empire school - and one of just 33 public schools in California - selected as a 2004 National Blue Ribbon School. In 2003, Alcott Elementary was the only school in Riverside County to receive this prestigious recognition. The title of National Blue Ribbon School is awarded by the U.S. Department of Education to schools that are academically superior or show dramatic gains in student achievement.

- **Five California Distinguished Schools**

Five elementary schools were honored last spring with the prestigious California Distinguished School Award (only eight districts in the entire state matched RUSD's number). Congratulations to Adams, Grant, Jefferson, Magnolia and Victoria. Grant Elementary School was also one of just 214 schools statewide to receive the Title 1 Academic Achievement Award that recognizes high achievement in high poverty schools.

- **Arlington High School's Envirothon team ranks 12th in North America**

In its second year as State Champions, Arlington's Envirothon team traveled to West Virginia last summer where they placed 12th among teams throughout North America. The Envirothon is an outdoor natural resource education program that teaches about environmental issues including aquatics, soils, forestry, and wildlife and encourages students to become more involved in conserving natural resources.

Granted, even with all of these positive trends, there are still many challenges to be faced. Student achievement is not where the district wants it to be at every school or at every grade level. Teachers and administrators continue working together to develop strategies and interventions – both school wide and individualized - to ensure that no child is left behind.

But the current results are heartening. In fact, longtime School Board trustee Lewis Vanderzyl had this to say at the completion of the student achievement report:

“I’m often asked when I’m out in the community how our schools are doing. I’ve been with this district in one way or another (parent, teacher, principal or trustee) for more than 40 years, and today there are more students taking more rigorous classes than ever before and our students are going on to college in greater numbers. I can honestly say this is the best shape we’ve ever been in academically.”